

Smoke Alarms

Information about smoke alarms and their use in the home.

Smoke alarms sense smoke and/or heat and sound an alarm to warn residents of a fire. Almost every day a smoke alarm saves somebody's life. A smoke alarm can cut your risk of dying in a home fire nearly in half.

1 Smoke Alarm Types

Be sure the smoke alarms you buy carry the UL label. This tells you that a representative sample of the smoke alarm has been evaluated by Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) and meets nationally recognized requirements. Several types of alarms are available. Some are battery powered and some use household electrical current. All will offer protection provided they are installed and maintained properly. Smoke alarms are readily available at hardware stores.

- Ionization:** When smoke enters an ionization detector, ionized air molecules attach to the smoke particles and reduce the ionizing current, triggering the alarm.
- Photoelectric:** When smoke enters a photoelectric detector, light from a pulsating light source is reflected off the smoke particles onto a light sensor, triggering the alarm.
- Combination:** Combination smoke detectors that feature both photoelectric and ionization technology are also available.
- Lithium powered:** Lithium powered smoke alarms have non-removable power cells that last for ten years and provide a solution to the problem of missing or dead batteries in smoke alarms.

2 Smoke Alarm Maintenance

- **INSTALL** smoke alarms near each sleeping area and on each level of your home. Read and follow the manufacturer's installation and maintenance instructions.
- **TEST** your smoke alarm each month. This ensures it is working and familiarizes your family to the alarm sound.
- **MAINTAIN** -The batteries should be changed annually. One suggestion is to change them in the fall when you change your clock time. When an alarm is "chirping" this indicates that the battery is low and needs to be replaced. Clean your smoke alarm using a vacuum and/or dust brush without removing the alarm's cover.
- **REPLACE** any smoke alarm that is more than 10 years old.

3 The Fire Emergency

Knowing what to do to save life and property in the event of fire may be the most important protection you can provide. A balanced home fire protection plan should include installing and maintaining smoke alarms, making and practicing a home escape plan.

- Make sure everyone is familiar with the sound of the smoke alarm.
- Plan and practice a home fire escape plan with your family. Know at least two ways out of each room and plan a meeting place outside.
- When the alarm sounds, go directly to the meeting place and call the fire department from a neighbor's phone.
- Never go back inside a burning building.

References: Underwriters Laboratory at http://www.ul.com/fallsafety/smoke_alarms.html; National Fire Protection Association <http://www.nfpa.org/Education/index.asp>;